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# THE LONELY GOD

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

JAMES STEPHENS

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## THE LONELY GOD

### I

So Eden was deserted, and at eve  
Into the quiet place God came to grieve.  
His face was sad: His hands hung slackly  
down

Along His robe. Too sorrowful to frown,  
He paced along the grassy paths and through  
The silent trees, and where the flowers grew,  
Tended by Adam. All the birds had gone  
Out to the world, and singing was not one  
To cheer the Lonely God out of His grief —  
The silence broken only when a leaf  
Tap't lightly on a leaf, or when the wind,  
Slow-handed, swayed the bushes to its mind.



## II

And so along the base of a round hill,  
Rolling in fern, He bent His way until  
He neared the little hut which Adam made,  
And saw its dusky roof-tree overlaid  
With greenest leaves. Here Adam and his  
spouse

Were wont to nestle in their little house  
Snug at the dew-time: here He, standing sad,  
Sighed with the wind, nor any pleasure had  
In heav'nly knowledge, for His darlings twain  
Had gone from Him to learn the feel of pain,  
And what was meant by sorrow and despair  
— Drear knowledge for a Father to prepare.

## III

Then, sad, He looked upon the little place  
— A beehive round it was — with not a  
trace

Of occupant or owner: standing dim  
Among the gloomy trees it seemed to Him  
A final desolation, the last word  
Wherewith the lips of silence had been stirred.  
Chaste and remote, so tiny and so shy,  
So new withal, so lost to any eye,  
So pac't of memories all innocent        1'  
Of days and nights that in it had been spent  
In blithe communion, Adam, Eve and He  
Afar from heaven and its gaudery.

## IV

And now no more! He still must be the God,  
But not the Friend: a Father with a rod  
Whose voice was fear, whose countenance a  
    threat,  
Whose coming terror and whose going wet  
With penitential tears: not ever more  
Would they run forth to meet Him, as  
    before,

With careless laughter, striving each to be  
First to His hand, and dancing in their glee  
To see Him coming — they would hide in-  
stead

At His approach, or stand and hang the head,  
Speaking in whispers, and would learn to  
pray

Instead of asking "Father, if we may."

## V

Never again to Eden would He haste  
At cool of evening, when the sun had paced  
Back from the tree-tops, slanting from the  
rim

Of a low cloud, what time the twilight dim  
Knit tree to tree in shadow, gathering slow  
Till all had met and vanished in the flow  
Of dusky silence, and a brooding star  
Stared at the growing darkness from afar.

While haply now and then some nested bird  
Would lift upon the air a sleepy word  
Most musical, or swing its airy bed  
To the high moon that drifted overhead.

## VI

'Twas good to quit at even His great throne,  
To lay His crown aside, and all alone  
Down sloping through the quiet air to glide,  
Unkenned by angels, silently and hide  
In the green fields, by dappled shades where  
    brooks

Through leafy solitudes and quiet nooks  
Flowed, hid from heav'nly majesty and pride,  
From light astounding and the wheeling  
    wide

Of roaring stars. Thus does it ever seem  
Good to the best to stray aside and dream  
In narrow places, where the hand can feel  
Something beside and know that it is real.

## VII

His angels! silly creatures who could sing,  
And sing again, and delicately fling  
The smoky censer, bow and stand aside  
In muted adoration; thronging wide  
Till nowhere could He look, but soon He saw  
An angel bending humbly to the law  
Mechanic; knowing nothing more of pain  
Than when they were forbid to sing again,  
Or swing anew the censer or bow down  
In humble adoration of His frown.  
This was the thought in Eden as He trod  
. . . It is a lonely thing to be a God.

## VIII

So long! afar through Time He bent His  
mind  
For the beginning which He could not  
find.

Through endless centuries and backwards  
still,

Endless for ever, till His 'stonied will  
Halted in circles, dizzied in the swing  
Of mazy nothingness — His mind could  
bring

Not to subjection, grip, or hold the theme  
Whose wide horizon melted like a dream  
To thinnest edges. Infinite behind  
The piling centuries were trodden blind  
In gulfs chaotic — so He could not see  
When He was not who always had To Be.

## IX

Not even Godly Fortitude can stare  
Into Eternity, nor easy bear  
The insolent vacuity of Time:  
It is too much, the mind can never climb  
Up to its meaning, for, without an end,  
Without beginning, plan, or scope, or trend

To point a path, there nothing is to hold  
And steady surmise: so the mind is rolled  
And swayed and drowned in dull Immensity.  
Eternity outfaces even Me  
With its indiff'rence, and the fruitless year  
Would swing as fruitless were I never here.

## X

And so for ever, day and night the same,  
Years flying swiftly nowhere, like a game  
Played random by a madman — without end  
Or any reasoned object but to spend  
What is unspendable — Eternal Woe!  
O Weariness of Time that fast or slow  
Goes never farther, never has in view  
An ending to the thing it seeks to do,  
And so does nothing: merely ebb and flow  
From nowhere into nowhere, touching so  
The shores of many stars, and passing on,  
Careless of what may come or what has gone.

## XI

O solitude unspeakable! to be  
For ever with oneself, never to see  
An equal face or feel an equal hand,  
To sit in state and issue reprimand,  
Admonishment or glory, and to smile  
Disdaining what was happening the while.  
O to be breast to breast against a foe!  
Against a friend! To strive and not to know  
The laboured outcome: Love nor be aware  
How much the other loved and greatly care  
With angry passion for that love or hate,  
Nor know what joy or dole was hid in Fate.

## XII

For I have ranged the spacy widths and  
gone  
Swift north and south, and strove to look  
upon



An ending somewhere. Many days I sped  
Hard to the west, a thousand years I fled  
Eastwards in fury, but I could not find  
The fringes of the Infinite. Behind  
And yet behind, and ever at the end  
Came new beginnings, paths that did not  
wend

To anywhere were there; and ever vast  
And vaster spaces opened till at last,  
Dizzied with distance, thrilling to a pain  
Unnameable, I turned to Heaven again.

## XIII

And there my angels were prepared to fling  
The cloudy incense, there prepared to sing  
My praise and glory — O in fury I  
Then roared them senseless, then threw down  
the sky  
And stamped upon it, buffeted a star  
With my great fist, and flung the sun afar:

Shouted my anger till the mighty sound  
Rung to the width, frightening the furthest  
bound

And scope of hearing: tumult vaster still,  
Thronging the echo, dinning my ears until  
I fled in silence, seeking some dark place  
To hide Me from the very thought of Space.

## XIV

And so, thought He, in my own image I  
Have made a man, remote from heaven high  
And all its humble angels. I have poured  
My essence in his nostrils. I have cored  
His heart with my own spirit. Part of Me  
His mind with laboured growth unceasingly  
Must strive to equal Mine, must ever grow  
By virtue of my essence till he know  
Both Good and Evil through the solemn  
test

Of Sin and Retribution, till, with zest,

He feels his godhead, soars to challenge Me  
In mine own heaven for supremacy.

## XV

Through savage beasts and still more savage  
clay,

Invincible, I bid him fight a way  
To greater battles; crawling through defeat  
Into defeat again; ordained to meet  
Disaster in disaster; prone to fall,  
I prick him with my memory to call  
Defiance at his victor, and arise  
With anguished fury to his greater size.  
Through tribulation, terror and despair,  
Astounded, he must fight to higher air,  
Climb battle into battle till he be  
Confronted with a flaming sword and Me.

## XVI

So growing age by age to greater strength,  
To greater beauty, skill and deep intent:

With wisdom wrung from pain, with energy  
Nourished in Sin and Sorrow he will be  
Strong, pure and proud an enemy to meet  
Tremendous on a battlefield, or sweet  
To talk to as a friend with candid mind.  
— Dear Enemy or Friend, so hard to  
find,

I yet shall find you, yet shall put My breast  
In enmity or love against your breast:  
Shall smite or clasp with equal ecstasy  
The Enemy or Friend who grows to Me.

## XVII

The topmost blossom of his growing I  
Shall take unto Me, cherish and lift high  
Beside Myself upon My holy Throne:  
— It is not good for God to be alone.  
The perfect Woman of his perfect race  
Shall sit beside Me in the highest place

And be My Goddess, Queen, Companion,  
Wife,

The rounder of My majesty, the life  
Of My ambition. She will smile to see  
Me bending down to worship at her knee  
Who never bent before, and she will say  
“Dear God, who was it taught *Thee* how to  
pray?”

## XVIII

And through Eternity, adown the slope  
Of never-ending Time, compact of hope,  
Of zest and young enjoyment, I and She  
Will walk together, sowing jollity  
Among the raving stars, and laughter through  
The vacancies of heaven, till the blue  
Vast amplitudes of Space lift up a song,  
The echo of our presence, rolled along  
And ever rolling where the Planets sing,  
The majesty and glory of the King.

Then, conquered, thou Eternity, shall lie  
Under My hand as little as a fly

## XIX

I am the Master. I the Mighty God  
And you my Workshop. Your pavilions trod  
By Me and Mine shall never cease to be,  
For you are but the magnitude of Me,  
The width of My extension, the surround  
Of My dense splendour. Rolling, rolling  
round

To steeped Infinity and out beyond  
My own strong comprehension you are  
bond

And servile to My doings. Let you swing  
More wide and ever wide you do but fling  
Around this instant Me and measure still  
The breadth and the proportion of My  
Will.

## XX

Then stooping to the hut, — a beehive  
round, —

God entered in and saw upon the ground  
A dusty garland, Adam, learned to weave,  
Had loving placed upon the head of Eve  
Before the terror came, when joyous they  
Could look for God at closing of the day  
Profound and happy. So the Mighty Guest  
Bent, took and placed the blossoms in His  
breast.

“This,” said He, gently, “I shall show My  
Queen

When She hath grown to Me in space serene  
And say, “’Twas worn by Eve.” So, smiling  
fair,

He spread abroad His wings upon the air.

## ASTRAY

LITTLE lady! as you walk  
With a shy and pensive pace:  
Little lady! as you talk  
I am looking in your face.

Who am I? you do not know,  
Or you wouldn't eye me so.

Sure your step is like a wave,  
And your voice is sweet to charm,  
And your face, composed and grave,  
Shows no motion of alarm.

Little lady! If I say  
Who I am, you'll run away.

Little lady! I am Death,  
I am sent to comfort thee:



Now you start and catch your breath:

Lady, do not run from me.

Just awhile ago you smiled,

Little lady! Little child!

Little lady! Smile of Grace!

This is not the road for you.

This is not a fitting place.

— Once there was a Lily grew

In a garden. — Cease to roam,

I have come to bring you home.

## IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE

I SAW this is a place at the world's end  
When He was left alone without a friend  
  
From every place, from far and near they  
    came,  
The blind and battered, and the lewd and  
    lame,  
The frightened people and the helpless crew  
Who hid in cellars, and the stragglers who  
Dodged here and there in corners of the earth  
Cursing the sun, and they who from their  
    birth  
Were lap't in madness, raved' and strode  
    along,  
Chanting in fury to a holy song

Their flighty wrath: and all the hungry folk,  
Who through the world had rummaged,  
yelped and broke

Stiff to a run, for vengeance was in view,  
And everyone knew what he had to do.

It was the Judgement Day, and so they sped,  
These vagabonds who always had been dead  
E'en when alive, and massed into the space  
Between two stars: a deep and hollow place  
Rolling immense, a swirl of blue and grey  
Steeped out of eyesight: so it ever lay  
Swinging in whispers, prickling to the sound  
Till a wind's whimper, rolling round and  
round,

Jolted in thunder, or the dreary sigh  
Of a dead man drummed madness on the sky.

Here they kept silence, every face intent  
With a dumb grin upon the sun was bent,

Till sudden, huge and stately, came He fleet  
Red from the sun, with fire about His feet  
And flaming brow: and as He walked in fire  
Those million, million muzzles lifted higher,  
Stared at Him, grinned damnation, toned a  
yelp,

A vast malignant query, "Did you help?"  
And at the sound the jangled spaces threw  
Echo to echo: thunders bit and flew  
Through deeper thunders into such a bay  
The Judge stood frightened, turned and stole  
away.

## CHANGE

THERE'S a cloud upon the sky.  
There's a voice upon the air.  
'Tis the wind that with a sigh  
Stays awhile and hushes by,  
Mourning where the thrushes were,  
Mourning that the trees are bare.

All the leaves have fallen slow:  
Now they rustle on the ground,  
Crinkle-tip and russet glow,  
Yellow leaf and brown they go  
With a little withered sound,  
Flitting on the air around.

All the birds have gone away,  
All the daisies too have fled:

Buttercups have had their day,  
And the grass is turning grey  
Thinking of the pansy dead,  
And the poppy's sleepy head.

Sad and sad the breezes blow.  
Leaves are lifted up and thrown  
— Crinkle-tip and russet glow —  
Withered to the earth below.  
Death's the harvest, Death alone.  
What's the use in having grown?

## WHO'LL CARRY A MESSAGE?

FATHER unto whom we lift  
At the closing of the day  
Prayer and praise — a tiny gift —  
Thou art very far away.  
Feeble little people we  
Vainly tell our misery.

If we cannot understand,  
Even while we pray to Thee,  
Why Thou dost not stretch a hand  
To allay our misery:  
Father unto whom we pray,  
Thou art very far away.

It is strange a Father should  
From His children thus be far.

Thou who art so great and good  
Surely cannot know we are  
Weeping here in misery,  
Mourning we are far from Thee.

Tears are very fragile things,  
Hopeless things that cannot rise:  
Sorrow has not any wings.  
How can Sorrow reach the skies?  
Fathers when they live too high  
Cannot hear their children cry.

If You hear us when we pray,  
Smitten down by hunger dread,  
Unto Thee from day to day,  
"Give us now our daily bread."  
Father, while Thy children groan  
Can Thou sit upon a throne?



## SECRETS

WHEN I was young, I used to think  
That every eye peered through a chink;  
And every man was hid behind  
His own thick self where none could find;  
That every woman in the street,  
Looking fair and smiling sweet,  
Was maybe hiding thoughts that were  
Not quite so sweet, nor quite so fair  
As her kind smile and blossom face:  
She hived in some forgotten place  
Within herself, and could not bear  
That any man should see her there.  
. . . . And though I'm older, still I see  
In every face a mystery.

## LIGHT O' LOVE

BUT now, said she, I must away.  
And if I tend another fire  
In some one's house, this you will say:  
It is not that her love doth tire;  
This is the price she has to pay  
For bread she gets no other way,  
Still craving for her heart's desire.

And so she went out from the door  
While I sat quiet in my chair.  
She ran back once again, no more:  
I heard a creaking on the stair,  
A lifted latch, one moment fleet  
I heard the noises of the street.  
Then silence booming everywhere.



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